

The Forward Eagle

Compiled Weekly

“Let us endeavor mutually to enlighten one another.”

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Essay

1.

Most of the small talk during the last days of September was about the big storm, a nor’easter, in the North Atlantic off the east coast. After tragic news from Tibet the week before, weather forecasters were not hedging their reports of a forming cyclone. States of emergency were at the ready.

2.

The 24-hour news cycle launched by CNN in 1980 popularized expressions that now define modern news, weather reporting and political communication.

The CNN effect describes how round-the-clock, real-time broadcasting affects knee-jerk reactions on a nationwide scale.

Breaking news has become a continuous operation that treats all events with equal urgency and importance. Information is no longer withheld for scheduled hourly and nightly broadcasts or for morning and evening editions. Production and consumption of news and weather events no longer pause for a reset.

Talking heads, expert panels and pundits have come to fill airtime with more expectation than incident. The daily news and weather literature flows all the while, and all the while lukewarm.

3.

A nor’easter is a powerful mid-latitude, extratropical cyclone that forms along the east coast of North America. Its rapid development and high intensity are driven by a clash between arctic atmospheric conditions and warm oceanic currents.

The Gulf Stream is a swift, warm ocean current that flows northward from the Gulf of Mexico along North America’s eastern seaboard. Even in the dead of winter, the current keeps coastal waters at relatively mild temperatures.

The warm waters evaporate rapidly, loading the lower sea-level atmosphere above the current with warm humid air. This becomes the incident storm’s literal fuel.

At the same time, an arctic air mass, driven by strong continental high-pressure systems, forces freezing-cold, dry air southward from Canada over the eastern United States. This high-altitude ribbon of fast-moving cold air is called the Jet Stream. It transports the arctic air south and east toward the Atlantic Ocean.

A "trough" formed in the upper atmosphere creates an area of wind-driven spin called vorticity. It pulls air upward away from the Earth's surface, establishing a sea-level low-pressure system.

Together these elements trigger a process known as baroclinic instability, or a storm fueled by horizontal temperature gradients rather than the warm water of tropical hurricanes.

A pressure drop that happens quickly, dropping at least 24 millibars in 24 hours, is referred to as a bombogenesis, a dangerous bomb cyclone, a nor’easter.

4.

In 1997 *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea* was a non-fiction bestseller published by Sebastian Junger. The book tells the story of a 1991 nor’easter and *The Andrea Gail*, a commercial sword fishing trawler out of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and its disappearance in the North Atlantic.

The storm itself was a rare combination of a powerful cold front, colliding high- and low-



On the Cliff a watercolor by Winslow Homer (circa 1881)

pressure systems of the nor’easter, and the warm air energy absorbed from the category 2 hurricane that formed simultaneously off Bermuda. The combination created a century-class tempest with high waves and 120-mph winds, Junger’s perfect storm.

The hurricane moved north and the cold front followed by a high-pressure system moved east and collided with the warmth of the Gulf Stream off the coast of Nova Scotia. The combination generated massive open-ocean waves of 40 to 80 feet high, with unconfirmed reports waves 100 feet high.

A catastrophic sea wave claimed the commercial fishing vessel and crew, inspiring Junger’s book and film. The term “perfect storm” subsequently was added into dictionaries.

5.

The 1978 blizzard in the northeastern United States was another historic nor’easter that struck mainland New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the New York metropolitan area. The Blizzard of '78 formed on Sunday, February 5, 1978.

The storm was initially known as "Storm Larry," following the local convention of naming storms followed by the Connecticut Travelers Weather Service on television and radio stations there. Snow fell mostly from Monday morning, February 6th to the evening of Tuesday, February 7th. Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts were hit especially hard.

Boston received a record-breaking 27.1 inches of snow; Providence also broke a record with 27.6 inches; Atlantic City broke an all-time storm accumulation with 20.1 inches; two Philadelphia suburban towns in Chester County received 20.2 inches, and the City of Philadelphia received 16.0 inches.

Nearly all economic activity was disrupted in the worst-hit areas. The storm killed about 100 people in New England and injured about 4,500. It caused, in 2026 dollars, more than US\$2.57 billion in property damage.

The storm was formed from an extratropical cyclone off the coast of South Carolina on February 5th. An arctic cold front and a warm air mass merged to create an intense low-pressure system.

Unreported, the system made its way up the coast and approached southern New England late February 6th and early February 7th. Since it developed during a new moon, an unusually

high tide occurred, and the huge storm brought massive amounts of high water to coastal communities.

Strong winds, extremely heavy snow and zero visibility for travelers, brought highways, streets and lanes to a standstill. The snow continued to fall for some 48 hours. By the time it ended, thousands of commuters had been stranded and homeless for several days.

6.

The recent 2026 nor’easter’s heavy weather, like the blue and white surf in Winslow Homer’s 1881 watercolor, remained safely offshore. Intensity was unexpectedly low, rainfall only slightly above normal and inland temperatures were seasonably mild.

Word of the Week

cyclone

/ˈsaɪ.kloo.n/ *noun*

1: a storm or system of winds that rotates about a center of low atmospheric pressure, advances at a speed of 20 to 30 miles (about 30 to 50 kilometers) an hour, and often brings heavy rain

2: any of various centrifugal devices for separating materials (such as solid particles from gases)

extratropical cyclone

noun

1: a cyclone in the middle or high latitudes often containing a cold front that extends toward the equator for hundreds of miles

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